
Book Review

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2015) *The Integration of Immigrants into American Society*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. 458 pages.

The integration of immigrants into their host societies is one of the most salient and controversial issues in many Western countries. Both the European refugee crisis in 2015 and the American presidential elections in 2016 positioned the topic of immigration at the center of political and public discourse. Unfortunately, participants in these debates frequently lack factual evidence to support their claims and tend to base their reasoning on emotional grounds instead. Reliable data derived from scientific research is therefore strongly needed.

The report *The Integration of Immigrants into American Society* responds to this need by providing up-to-date research data regarding American society. It was written by a panel of established scholars and offers a concise summary of a wide range of aspects of immigrant integration, including its *legal, spatial, civic, political, socioeconomic* and *sociocultural* dimensions. The authors organize the report around the *historical, legal, economic, and institutional* context of integration.

The analysis draws on multiple data sources, most importantly on *administrative data* and governmental and non-governmental *surveys* such as the *American Community Survey (ACS)* or the *Current Population Survey (CPS)*. Additionally, the authors extensively review the literature regarding each topic, putting a fair amount of emphasis on qualitative studies as well (e.g. regarding the effects of legal status on integration). We find the inclusion of *historical aspects* into the analysis to be of special merit.

The report starts by examining the *legal and institutional context* of integration. The authors point out that legal frames, and immigration law in particular, significantly impact integration trajectories by creating varying degrees of stability and opportunities for immigrants. In the United States, there are three levels of legal framework (federal, state and local) with different responsibilities, and often with conflicting interests. For instance, while there is no centralized immigrant integration system in the US, and the majority of integration services are delegated to the state level, the federal government maintains most control over immigrant entry and exit.

The legal status of immigrants (permanent, temporary, discretionary, and undocumented) has a significant impact on the patterns and depth of their integration through moderating access to employment opportunities, higher education, social services, and health care. Many individuals move through two or more of these statuses during their lifetime, or even within a few years. Undocumented status is a particularly dynamic and fluid category, as many immigrants start with this status, and even more find themselves with it at some point.

The effect of legal status on integration intersects with other social markers such as *age, gender* and *national origin*. Gender is probably the most salient factor as the vast majority of deportees are males (over 90 per cent). As most of them are the sole

earners in the household, their deportation increases the household's risk of poverty. Furthermore, the spouses of many temporary workers are prevented from accessing employment, which disproportionately affects women.

In public discourse, undocumented immigrants are often conflated with Latinos, which leads to racial profiling and discrimination, creating further barriers to the integration of these particular groups. For instance, the report quotes recent research which found that 91 per cent of deportees came from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, while these nationals make up only 73 per cent of the undocumented population. As to *generation*, different age groups face different challenges. Undocumented young immigrants may be unable to obtain a driver's license or formal identification documents, which greatly affects their social life and socialization into adulthood (e.g. by denying them access to adult establishments). Moreover, recent studies have shown that even US-born children with undocumented parents are challenged by lower levels of cognitive development, slower educational progress, and higher levels of anxiety and depressive symptoms than the native population. Additionally, due to the heightened fear of deportation, long-term effects also include a weaker sense of American identity.

According to the multiple surveys described in the report, the majority of immigrants want to become naturalized citizens. The requirement for naturalization is five years of residence as a lawful permanent resident (LPR). However, evidence suggests that in reality this may be a longer process. In 2013, the median new citizen had seven years of residence as a LPR before her nationalization. Regarding political representation, the report clearly demonstrates that foreign-born residents are seriously underrepresented at all levels of government.

An interesting feature of the analysis concerns the *spatial dimension* of integration (*Chapter 5*). While the metropolitan areas of traditional gateway states (e.g. New York, Texas, California) still remain significant targets for immigration, the post-1965 'new immigration' trends show an increased orientation towards new states (e.g. Alabama, Nebraska, South Carolina), as well as towards rural areas; the latter especially in the case of Latin American immigrants. The positive outcome of leaving traditional enclaves – where cultural and institutional support is ensured – is exit from segregated areas and the discovery of new opportunities, indicating that '*social and spatial mobility presumably go hand in hand*' (p. 209). However, the lack of institutional support and the higher probability of encountering anti-immigrant attitudes in the new destinations are among the risk factors.

While we find the chapter on spatial integration promising and high-quality, some concerns remain. First of all, it would have been fruitful to describe the spatial distribution and characteristics of economic integration at the level of distinct administrative units (e.g. state, metropolitan-suburban-rural area, neighborhood). Furthermore, more detailed historical analysis would have provided a more refined picture of the evolution of immigration and the transition between the pre- and the post-1965 periods. For instance, the 'hyperselectivity' of Asian immigrants (i.e. their highly educated and highly selective background) and the weak(est), even undocumented, position of Latin Americans could have been interpreted from the perspective of spatial selectivity – involving migration costs as well as (prior) interstate contacts (see Portes and Böröcz, 1989 or Sassen, 2006). Moreover, while the analysis

is detailed in terms of race and ethnicity, and sometimes even by country of origin, the host society in most cases is considered to be populated by 'native-born, white non-Hispanics', with little reference to the significant native-born African American population. Finally, concerning the shift towards new destinations, it is not detailed whether those who are settling down in such places have previously lived in traditional immigrant destinations, and thus whether internal chain-migration is preceding 'continuous migration' (Solien de Gonzalez, 1961), or whether these immigrants are newcomers, which would involve a change in the composition of new immigrants, as well as a change in the links to the networks of enclaves.

The report measures *socioeconomic integration* by educational attainment, employment, earnings, and poverty rate by origin and generation. In general, post-1965 immigrants have higher educational attainments than their predecessors. However, education level significantly diverges according to origin (Asia and Africa sending a relatively higher number of immigrants with high educational attainment, while Latin America and the Caribbean are the origin of more immigrants of low educational attainment). The quite open labor market of the US facilitates quick integration into employment, even among the least-educated immigrants, which indicates that employer demand for low-skilled labor is high. However, the earnings of recent migrants are lower than the earnings of the native-born population, even though they increase with length of residency. Moreover, there is an important potential barrier to earnings mobility, namely *skin color discrimination*. The report reviews earlier research using the *New Immigrant Survey* data which found that, after controlling for education, English-language proficiency, country of origin, occupation, family background, ethnicity and race, immigrants with the lightest skin color still earned 16 to 23 per cent more than those with the darkest. These results confirm the 'racial/ethnic disadvantage model of assimilation' (Glazer and Moynihan, 1963; Glazer, 1993); the fact that race and physically visible ethnic differences are barriers to economic upward mobility. This *ethnic disadvantage* model may have social and cultural consequences, such as an increase in the importance of bounded solidarity, ensuring favorable economic conditions within the disadvantaged ethnic group, but hindering assimilation and integration due to 'Constraints on Freedom' and 'Leveling Pressures' (Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993).

Sociocultural integration is also covered by the report. The two main components are the acceptance of immigrants by the host society, and the cultural assimilation of immigrants. Regarding *acceptance*, a Pew Research Center survey described in the report showed that in 2013, 52 per cent of Americans believed that newcomers from other countries strengthen American society. Regarding *cultural assimilation*, immigrants' attitudes about political and social issues (e.g. political ideology, same-sex marriage) were similar to those of the native-born population. English language acquisition is also a key indicator of integration. However, four and a half per cent of households in the US were 'linguistically isolated'; i.e. no adult member spoke English at a high level. The largest proportion of such households were inhabited by Asians and Pacific Islanders, followed by Spanish-speaking individuals. Religion is another important factor in integration, providing a way for many immigrants to become accepted in the United States. In some cases, religious groups facilitated the upward mobility of the second generation. The report also cites

extensive data to demonstrate that immigrants, on average, are less likely to commit crimes than natives. Although members of second and third generations have higher crime rates than those of the first generation (the ‘immigrant paradox’), the rate is still lower than amongst the native-born, and assimilated immigrants (the ‘assimilation paradox’).

Our most important concern is that the authors only focus on the host society regarding sociocultural integration, thereby neglecting the perspective of immigrants (see, for instance, Phinney et al., 2001, in which immigrants’ willingness to maintain their own culture and values was also measured). Moreover, changes in spatial integration are also neglected. In relation to embeddedness and movement to new destinations, in the case of chain-migration it is quite reasonable to assume that the constraints of ethnic social capital (Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993) ‘push’ better-performing immigrants out from enclaves to new destinations.

The report also elaborates the marital status of immigrants and their household structure. Ethnoracial intermarriages can bring together the different social networks of spouses, as well as build bridges between cultures. The proportion of ethnoracial intermarriage increases from generation to generation among immigrants. New media and online sites are also contributing to the breakup of the traditional marital market and decreasing the distance between ethnic groups.

The panel experts also make some recommendations for future research and social policy. They suggest that the U.S. Bureau of Census collect data about the birthplace of parents and the legal status of immigrants in their surveys, and that Congress create a survey to examine the undocumented population (*Chapter 10*). They also underline the importance of further research – for instance, for evaluating the impact of job-training programs for immigrants (*Chapter 3*) and identifying the reasons for the lag in the naturalization process of LPRs (*Chapter 4*).

To sum up, the report focuses on a salient contemporary issue, and provides a concise overview of the most recent research findings. It demonstrates, among other things, that in opposition to mainstream political and public discourse, immigrants in the United States are, on average, as similarly qualified and employed as the native population, while the crime rate for this group is significantly lower than that of the latter, especially so in the case of first- and less well integrated second-generation immigrants. Nevertheless, there are huge gaps between different immigrant groups, some of them outperforming the native population according to several metrics (e.g. educational performance, qualifications), while other groups lag behind. This contrasts with the European situation, where immigrants, on average, are much less well qualified and employed than the native population. However, both the EU and the US face several similar problems regarding immigration, including skin-color discrimination as regards labor market opportunities and earnings (ethnic disadvantage), and the detrimental effects of temporary statuses on integration and cognitive development (fear of deportation).

One major merit of this report is that it covers a wide variety of relevant features of the process of integration, ranging from the legal context to educational attainment and spatial differences. It also provides a historical overview of trends and changes. Even though the report focuses on analyzing integration into American society, it will

be useful reading for European researchers and policy-makers alike, as well as for the wider public who are interested in the process of the integration of immigrants.

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